

POPULATION

McCleary, G. F. *Race Suicide?* London, 1945. Allen & Unwin. Price 5s.

DR. MCCLEARY has the rare gift of writing for the layman without being patronizing. So his new book ought to find a large number of readers among those who are anxious to learn without having their intelligence insulted. This reviewer is one of that band, and pretends to no previous knowledge of population problems or eugenics—has no critical equipment, indeed, beyond a share in the ideology of the present generation about the problem.

Dr. McCleary's book takes the reader over ground which must be familiar to students of the subject: the approach of early demographers to the problem of declining birth-rates in the Western civilizations, the results of recent American statistical research, and the work of the Myrdals in Sweden. The exposition is lucid and concise and encourages the layman to refute for himself the fallacious arguments of politicians with which he or she is familiar. Dr. McCleary offers no easy solutions. His point of view seems to be that of the Myrdals. The problem of declining populations, he thinks, can, at the present stage of scientific knowledge, be attacked empirically at the material end by controlled social reforms. At the same time he appeals to people of goodwill to devote to family propaganda the same ingenuity that is devoted to pressing birth-control appliances on the public.

The book is concerned with the quality as well as the quantity of the population. To eugenicists Dr. McCleary's arguments about the pre-eminent influence of environment on intelligence may seem questionable. The lay reader with some experience of the effects of a new home on the school record of young evacuees will be inclined to endorse his optimism, an endorsement, however, which may be based on a mixture of scientific ignorance and self-congratulation. (The reviewer's own unscientific opinion is that the most effective environmental factor in the new life of evacuees was contact with

more correct speech habits, rather than diet or fresh air.)

The reasons advanced by ordinary men and women for limiting their families are scrupulously examined. There is one reason, a reason commonly advanced by women, which escapes mention. This is fear of death or "complications" at childbirth. In a straw-vote taken by the reviewer in a lower middle-class area no less than five out of eight women questioned gave this as their reason for not increasing small families or for not having any children at all. Those who had no children said that their views had been confirmed by the warnings of relatives or friends. Admittedly casual inquiries of this sort have no scientific value, but it is at least possible that this sort of reason underlies a great many of the conventional answers to questionnaires, and that an extension of up-to-date maternity services coupled with propaganda about progress in this field of medicine might have good results. The comfortable and common theory that childbirth leaves no scars on the memory is, at any rate, one of grandfather's tales.

There is one other omission in Dr. McCleary's book which is troublesome to the layman. Why is it that Holland remains a little island of optimism in a surrounding sea of declining birth-rates? Its social structure and economic history are not markedly different from those of its near neighbours. What is the local factor or complex of factors which makes the difference? Sir Alan Herbert, M.P., might be tempted to put it down to the conviviality induced by the excellent local beer.

SALLY CHILVER.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Lafitte, Francois. *Britain's Way to Social Security.* Target for Tomorrow Series. London, 1945. Pilot Press. Pp. 110. Price 6s.

IN this little book of just over 100 pages Mr. Lafitte surveys and compares the proposals of the Beveridge Report and the White Paper on Social Insurance, and con-